

Learning Guide

Alix West-Lefler Alex Poch-Goldin Jason O'Mara Christopher Heyerdahl



JOURNEYS IN FILM™
educating for global understanding



EQUINOX DREAM PROJECT AND FEZIWIG STUDIOS PRESENT THE FAST RUNNER
ALIX WEST LEFLER ALEX POCH-GOLDIN JASON O'MARA CHRISTOPHER HEYERDAHL DAVID ATTAR CARMEL AMIT ORIGINAL SCORE BY RONNY KATZ
EDITED BY RICHARD NORD PRODUCTION DESIGNER SARAH MONTEITH DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID BERCOVICI-ARTIEDA CO-PRODUCER FABIOLA ARIAS
PRODUCERS KEN SHAPKIN LEAH WARSHAWSKI CO-EP'S JOHN & TRUDY JACOBSON EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JANE TAYLOR-LEE BRIAN GOTTL CURTIS CHAMBERS JACOB BERCOVICI
DAN ANGEL JANE CHARLES PRODUCED BY DAVID BERCOVICI-ARTIEDA MICHAEL BRUCE ADAMS WRITTEN BY MICHAEL BRUCE ADAMS DIRECTED BY DAVID BERCOVICI-ARTIEDA

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Note to Users: Each section is designed to be used independently and can stand alone for learning and growth in these areas in connection with the film. You can also use the guide in its entirety for a rich, in-depth learning experience.



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FACILITATION GUIDELINES



Filmmakers use immersive storytelling to produce intense thoughts and emotions in the viewer. **Journeys in Film** uses this powerful medium as a springboard for meaningful dialogue around humanity's most pressing issues. In this guide, you will find suggestions for leading productive conversations that broaden perspectives, increase global competency, encourage empathy, and build new paradigms for education.

- When watching a film or having a powerful discussion, normalize taking breaks and exercising bodily autonomy. Acknowledge that conversations around complex topics can be vulnerable, complicated, and challenging. Encourage members to voice and do what is right for them without needing to explain or apologize.
- People do their best when they know what to expect. Start and end your meetings on time.
- Share or co-create your intentions for the meeting.
- Create your space. If possible, share snacks or find other ways to create an inviting, comfortable atmosphere.
- Create a trustworthy space. Maintain confidentiality and only speak to your own experience.
- Minimize distractions while you are together. Silence cell phones and devices so you can give your full attention to the conversation.
- Practice whole-body listening. Listen to words, tone, body language, and the feeling in the atmosphere.
- Acknowledge voices that may be absent. Is there a lived experience that isn't represented in your group? Who are the bridge people who might be able to connect you with other people in your community who might bring new perspectives to the table?
- Adopt an attitude of positive intent. If someone says something that bothers you, assume positive intent and ask for more information.
- Ignite your curiosity around other people's views and opinions. Listen to understand, not to respond. You don't need to agree with others in your group or make it known that you are "right" to have a worthwhile conversation.
- Words matter. Be open to learning and practicing new ways to communicate with others.
- Be clear, direct, and kind in your communication. Nobody benefits when you bottle your opinions.
- Everyone has blind spots and biases; cultivate a space of grace as you enter into new territory together.
- If a conversation gets heated, practice acknowledging the tension, pausing as a group, and taking a collective breath together before diving back in or taking a longer break to reset.
- Privilege your relationships with others over the content or agenda of the meeting. Show each other kindness.
- Create a closing ritual that celebrates the time you've spent together and either gives closure or gives members something to think about before your next meeting.



ABOUT THE FILM



Set in Nazi-occupied Poland at the onset of World War II, *The Fast Runner* is a short narrative film that tells the story of Frida, a young Polish Jewish girl whose life and worldview are forever changed by the devastating realities of the Holocaust — and by an unexpected lesson in compassion.

Through Frida's personal experience, the film explores how the Holocaust was not just a historical event, but a deep human tragedy shaped by individual choices, moral complexities, and acts of quiet resistance. At the heart of Frida's community is her beloved best friend and spiritual mentor, the Rabbi, a man known for his unwavering kindness. He begins every interaction with a warm, heartfelt greeting — even toward Herr Müller, the neighborhood Polish policeman. While the Rabbi's behavior confuses Frida, it also intrigues her: How can one demonstrate compassion to someone who is your neighbor and who becomes directly involved in persecuting and terrorizing their Jewish community?



At its core, *The Fast Runner* tells a deeply Jewish story — a story of resilience, identity, and moral struggle in the face of unprecedented persecution. Through the experience of Frida, the film explores how the Jewish community, as the Nazis' primary target for complete extermination, navigated dehumanization and impossible moral choices during the Holocaust. The central, systematic, and industrialized goal of the Holocaust was total annihilation of the Jewish community, resulting in the murder of six million Jewish people. The Nazis also victimized other marginalized groups, including Roma, people with disabilities, and political opponents, whom they viewed as racial, biological, or ideological threats to their vision of a “pure” German society. Nazi ideology, rooted in racism, antisemitism, nationalism, and eugenics, dehumanized entire populations and fueled mass atrocities across Europe during World War II.

The Fast Runner carefully illustrates the different stages of the Holocaust era. It begins by portraying the richness of pre-war Jewish life, where they enjoyed the full vibrancy of everyday life. It then transitions to the period of ghettoization, when they were forcibly segregated, isolated, and confined to precarious conditions. Finally, the film confronts viewers with the deportations — the systematic transportation of Jewish people from towns and cities to ghettos, labor camps, and extermination camps where their survival became a matter of chance and resistance. Through Frida’s story, *The Fast Runner* invites audiences to witness not only the historical realities of the Holocaust but also the enduring strength of the human spirit in the face of unimaginable cruelty.

The film encourages viewers to make the connection between history and humanity by showing how quickly basic human rights can be taken away when hatred and exclusion are institutionalized. It prompts questions about the power of choice and what it means to do the right thing, even when it’s hard. Even in oppressive systems, choices still matter. Viewers are asked to reflect on the choices people make — to resist, comply, speak out, or remain silent — and how those choices shape history.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The Fast Runner was born from a place of memory, responsibility, and compassion.

As the son of a Holocaust survivor, I grew up surrounded by silence — a silence that spoke volumes. It wasn't until later in life, when I began conducting interviews for Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation, that I truly began to understand the magnitude of what had been endured and what had been lost. I carried those voices with me — dozens of testimonies of survival, resistance, and unfathomable pain — and they changed me.

This film is also deeply inspired by the writings of Holocaust survivor and historian Yaffa Eliach, whose work preserved stories of moral courage and compassion during the Holocaust. And above all, it is a tribute to my father, Emanuel Bercovici, whose quiet strength and humanity continue to guide me every day.

Rather than focusing on graphic violence or spectacle, *The Fast Runner* invites viewers — especially young people — to witness a simple yet profound moral choice made by a child during the Holocaust. Through this lens, we explore the enduring power of compassion, courage, and dignity in the face of overwhelming darkness.

I'm absolutely thrilled and honored to partner with Journeys in Film — an organization whose vision aligns so beautifully with our own.

Their commitment to using the power of storytelling to ignite empathy and understanding in the classroom is nothing short of inspiring. With their support, *The Fast Runner* can now live beyond the screen and become a living, breathing educational tool — one that sparks dialogue, reflection, and a deeper connection to the human stories behind history.

This is not just a film — it's a call to remember, to feel, and to care. Created with over 200 volunteers, powered entirely by donations, and crafted using 35mm film and period-correct lenses to immerse the viewer in its time, *The Fast Runner* is a labor of love, remembrance, and compassion. I could not be more grateful to share it with young audiences through this extraordinary partnership.

— David Bercovici-Artieda
Director, Producer, & Cinematographer, *The Fast Runner*



David Bercovici-Artieda
Director, Producer, & Cinematographer

TIMELINE OF THE HOLOCAUST



The following timeline provides a brief overview of key events leading up to, during, and following the Holocaust. Its primary source is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Holocaust Timeline of Events ([USHMM Timeline](#)), a visually engaging and comprehensive resource rich with primary and secondary sources that illuminate each event in greater depth. It serves as an invaluable tool for both educators and students — ideal for classroom instruction, independent research, and thoughtful reflection on the historical progression of the Holocaust. While the USHMM timeline is a primary source for this resource, additional sources can be found in the “Additional Resources” section for expanded exploration and context.

If possible, invite learners to explore The [Montreal Holocaust Museum Interactive Map](#), which visually illustrates Germany's occupation during World War II and highlights key locations of persecution and mass killings.

Before 1933: Aftermath of World War I and the Formation of the Nazi Party

1918

End of World War I: An armistice, or ceasefire agreement, is signed between the Germans and the Allies (France, Great Britain (including Canada), Russia, Italy, Japan, and, later, the United States), officially ending World War I. Germany suffers defeat with over 1.7 million total dead, including about one-fifth of the German army. They also experience devastating losses to their economy, their territories, their military, and their pride.

November Revolution: The discontent over the loss of World War I leads to an uprising of German soldiers, political leaders, and workers, which results in the abdication of Germany's leader, Kaiser Wilhelm II, making way for the establishment of the Weimar Republic. As Germany makes its first attempt as a democracy, with a parliament known as the Reichstag and an elected president, extreme political parties form, struggling for power, and often violently taking to the streets.

1919

The Treaty of Versailles is Signed: Following their defeat in World War I, many Germans feel a deep sense of embarrassment and national humiliation. This collective shame and resentment creates fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take root in the years that follow. The signing of the Treaty of Versailles imposes severe economic and territorial penalties on Germany. Nearly one-tenth of Germany's valuable industrial land is given to France and Belgium. Germany gives up all its foreign colonies. Military restrictions include a reduction in the German army to only 100,000 men. In addition, Germany is forced to take responsibility for the war and pay reparations. Many Germans perceive the treaty as a “Diktat,” a dictated peace or harsh penalty forced upon them, and feelings of resentment grow with military and political leaders placing blame on Jewish people and Communists for the defeat. Revision of the Versailles Treaty later becomes a central platform for extremist parties in Germany, including Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party, increasing their ability to gain traction with mainstream voters with promises to rebuild the military, reclaim lost territory (especially in the east) and restore Germany's status as a major European and global power after the humiliating defeat.

1919 (*continued*)

Formation of the German Workers Party: The German Workers Party is formed, composed mostly of former military personnel and unemployed workers. Party members promote nationalist, antisemitic, and white supremacy ideologies.

1920–21

Formation of the Nazi Party and the Rise of Adolf Hitler: The German Workers Party changes its name to National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) or the Nazi Party. Adolf Hitler joins and soon takes control, increasingly spreading rhetoric regarding the desire for a racially pure German population.

1923

Beer Hall Putsch: In an attempt to overthrow the German government, Hitler and the Nazis concoct a plot called the "Beer Hall Putsch," intended to seize control of the local government in Munich. The plot fails and Hitler is arrested for treason and sentenced to five years in prison, but is released after one year.

1925

***Mein Kampf* is Published:** While in prison, Hitler writes the first volume of *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle"). The book details Hitler's radical ideas of German nationalism, antisemitism, white supremacy, and anti-Communism. He links Social Darwinism with the human struggle, arguing that only the strongest races survive and the German race should be kept "pure." The book becomes the ideological base for the Nazi Party and uses deep-rooted antisemitism to justify its racist policies.

1927

The Nazis Gain Support Through Strategic Propaganda: After Hitler's release from prison, he reforms the Nazi Party to successfully compete in future German elections. He establishes the SA (Sturmabteilung), a paramilitary unit; the SS, (Schutzstaffel), an elite group that serves as a security unit; and a propaganda department. To gain the support of the people, Nazi sympathizers stir up trouble in small towns suffering from the poor economy and political instability. The Nazi SA then comes in with brutal tactics and restores order. Gradually, the tactics work on people's fears and they support the Nazis.

1929

The Great Depression: The U.S. stock market crashes, triggering the Great Depression. Germany's economy, heavily reliant on American loans, collapses, leading to mass unemployment and social unrest. The Weimar Republic is unable to cope with the problems of high unemployment, high inflation, and public despair. The coalition government of liberal and conservative parties in the Reichstag (Parliament) collapses. President Paul von Hindenburg is persuaded to impose emergency powers allowing him to restore order. Laws now come from the executive branch, bypassing the Reichstag legislature.

1932

Hitler Becomes Chancellor of Germany: President von Hindenburg faces another election. He decides to run again to prevent Hitler from becoming president. Hindenburg wins as president, but the Nazi Party wins almost 37 percent of the vote, making it the largest party in the Reichstag. The nation continues to suffer under von Hindenburg's ineffective policies, and Hitler keeps the pressure on with massive propaganda campaigns and daily street violence. In a desperate move, von Hindenburg appoints Hitler as chancellor (prime minister) of Germany and head of the Reichstag, hoping he can control him.

1933–1938: Rise of the Nazi Party and The Beginnings of the Holocaust

1933

The Reichstag Fire Decree Suspends Civil Liberties:

The Reichstag building in Berlin, the seat of the German parliament, is set ablaze by an arsonist. The Nazi Party declares it a communist plot to overthrow the government, in order to pressure President Paul von Hindenburg to issue the Reichstag Fire Decree, which suspends civil liberties, including freedom of the press, assembly, and association. In order to suppress opposition, the decree allows the regime to arrest and imprison political opponents without trial, dissolve political organizations, and suppress publications.

The Dachau Camp is Established: The Enabling Act is passed, granting Hitler dictatorial powers and allowing him to enact laws without Reichstag approval. Shortly after, the first concentration camp is established in Dachau, Germany, to incarcerate political opponents.

Disenfranchisement of Targeted Groups: The Nazi regime organizes a nationwide boycott of Jewish-owned businesses, marking the beginning of systematic economic persecution of Jewish people. They also engage in other modes of systematic oppression, including the burning of “un-German” books, exclusion of Jewish people from civil service positions, and restrictions against Jewish children in public schools. The German government also passes the “Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases” which provides their basis for the involuntary sterilization of disabled individuals and people identified as having mental illness, as well as Roma, those identified as “asocial elements,” and Black people.

1935

The Nuremberg Laws: The Nuremberg Laws are enacted, transforming the definition of Jewish identity from religious to racial and stripping Jewish people of German citizenship.

1938–1945: The Holocaust and World War II

1938

Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass): A pogrom, or violent attack, exclusively against Jewish synagogues, businesses, and homes across Germany and Austria that results in widespread destruction and the arrest of approximately 30,000 Jewish people. This nationwide program will foster the outbreak of war that marks the transition in Nazi racial antisemitism toward genocide. The “Night of Broken Glass” is considered to be the official beginning of the era of the Holocaust.

1939

Germany invades Poland: Initiating World War II, this leads to the establishment of ghettos and the beginning of mass deportations of Jewish people. Hitler also authorizes an order allowing doctors to legally murder people with disabilities through euthanization with no threat of prosecution. Great Britain and France officially declare war on Germany; however, initially there is only limited engagement.

Piotrków Ghetto Established: The Third Reich occupies Piotrków Trybunalski, a city in central Poland, and establishes the Piotrków Ghetto, the first official ghetto created by the Nazis during WWII and operating from 1939 to 1942. Thousands of Jewish people are confined within the ghetto's sealed boundaries, causing extreme overcrowding and dire living conditions.

1940

Auschwitz Camp Established: Auschwitz, also known as Auschwitz-Birkenau, is established as the largest of the Nazi concentration and death camps. Located in southern Poland, it evolves into a network of camps where Jewish people and other perceived enemies of the Nazi state are exterminated, often in gas chambers, or used as slave labor. During World War II, more than one million people lose their lives at Auschwitz.

Dunkirk Evacuation: Nazi Germany attacks France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. British and French soldiers retreat to the French port town of Dunkirk. The Allied troops are able to escape from Dunkirk with the help of British ships and boats that ferry them across the English Channel to Britain. The rescue is not just the work of British naval ships: More than 800 fishing boats, some piloted by civilians, rescue approximately 338,000 soldiers over nine days. Not long after these events, France surrenders to Germany, and Britain stands largely alone against Nazi Germany.

Axis Powers Established: The Tripartite Pact (Berlin Pact), a military alliance between Germany, Italy, and Japan, is signed in Berlin, formalizing the Axis Powers.

1941

Krakow Ghetto Established: German authorities announce, establish, and seal a ghetto in Krakow, Poland. Between 15,000 and 20,000 Jewish people are forced to live within the ghetto boundaries, which are enclosed by barbed-wire fences and, in places, by a stone wall. A Jewish resistance movement forms in the Krakow ghetto, with leaders focusing underground operations initially on supporting education and welfare organizations.

Operation Barbarossa: Germany launches its largest military operation of the war, Operation Barbarossa, with plans to invade the Soviet Union. Despite initial German successes, the operation ultimately fails due to the harsh winter conditions, the resilience of the Soviet forces, and the vastness of the Soviet territory. This is a significant turning point in the war, as it opens the Eastern Front, bringing the Soviet Union into the Allied forces, strengthening them against Germany.

Occupation of Kyiv (The Babi Yar Massacre): German forces enter Kyiv (Kiev), the capital of Soviet Ukraine. During the first days of the German occupation, two major explosions destroy the German headquarters. The Germans use the sabotage as a pretext to order German authorities to murder the Jewish population of Kyiv at Babyn Yar (Babi Yar), a ravine northwest of the city. As the victims move into the ravine, they are shot in small groups. Over 33,771 Jewish people are murdered during this two-day period, which becomes one of the largest mass murders at an individual location during World War II.

The United States joins the Allied Forces: The day after the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, a U.S. Navy base in Hawaii, the U.S. declares war on Japan and officially enters World War II on the side of the Allied Forces.

1942

The Wannsee Conference: The Wannsee Conference is held, where Nazi officials formalize the “Final Solution” to the “Jewish Question,” planning the systematic extermination of the Jewish population by establishing a larger network of extermination camps.

Operation Reinhard: Operation Reinhard is established as the code name for the German plan to murder two million Jewish people in German-occupied Poland. It is marked as the deadliest day in Holocaust history. Approximately 1.7 million Jewish people are slaughtered in killing centers and mass shootings. Individuals from other minority groups are also murdered: Poles, Roma (Gypsies), and prisoners of war.

1943

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: As the Nazis come to deport members of the Jewish community from the Warsaw Ghetto, they are met with mines, grenades, and bullets. Mordechai Anielewicz, leader of the Jewish Combat Organization, commands over 700 young Jewish fighters during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which is considered the first and largest acts of armed resistance against the Nazi persecution during World War II.

1944

D-Day: Under the code name “Operation Overlord,” over 150,000 U.S., British, and Canadian troops (the Allied Forces) land on the beaches of Normandy, France. A significant turning point of WWII, D-Day marks the beginning of the Allied invasion and is the largest land and water invasion in history. The success of D-Day opens a Western front, hastens the liberation of Europe from Nazi control, and brings the Allies one step closer to defeating Germany.

1944 (continued)

The Auschwitz Report: *The Auschwitz Report*, written by two Slovak Jewish prisoners who escaped from Auschwitz, goes public through media channels in Switzerland, launching a worldwide press campaign condemning Nazi atrocities and intensifying rescue efforts.

1945

End of WWII: Soviet forces liberate Auschwitz-Birkenau, uncovering the extent of Nazi atrocities. As Soviet forces near his command bunker in central Berlin, Adolf Hitler commits suicide, and Berlin falls to the Soviets within days. Germany and Japan surrender unconditionally to the Allies, ending World War II.

Postwar Aftermath and Exodus: Holocaust survivors and the Jewish families who made it through the war begin the difficult journey of rebuilding their lives. Most no longer feel safe in Europe, leading to a massive exodus of refugees seeking safe haven in countries outside the continent. However, they often face resistance and strict immigration policies that limit opportunities for Jewish people to emigrate.

The Nuremberg Trials begin: A series of military tribunals are held to prosecute high-ranking Nazi leaders for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Held in Nuremberg, Germany, these trials mark the first time international law is used to hold a government accountable for such crimes. They establish lasting principles of justice and set a precedent for future international courts.

1950

First Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Published: Holocaust survivors begin sharing their personal stories with the world. Landmark works like *The Diary of Anne Frank* and Elie Wiesel's *Night* bring global awareness to the human experience behind the Holocaust.

1961

The Eichmann Trial in Israel: Adolf Eichmann, a key architect of the Holocaust, is captured and tried in Jerusalem. The televised trial exposes the horrors of the Holocaust to a worldwide audience and gives survivors a public voice.

1979

First Holocaust Survivor Oral Testimonies Recorded: Efforts begin to preserve Holocaust survivor stories on film. These oral histories become a vital tool for education and remembrance, capturing firsthand accounts.

Additional Resources

Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center

<https://www.fswc.ca/holocaust-and-genocide-education-resources>

Journeys in Film. 2013. *Defiant Requiem Curriculum Guide*.

<https://journeysinfilm.org/product/defiant-requiem/>

Journeys in Film. 2018. *Schindler's List Curriculum Guide*.

<https://journeysinfilm.org/product/schindlers-list/>

Montreal Holocaust Museum

<https://museeholocauste.ca/en/history-holocaust/>

Montreal Holocaust Museum Interactive Timeline

<https://histoire.museeholocauste.ca/en/map/war-persecutions-mass-killings>

The National WWII Museum

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/>

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Timeline of Events

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/time-line/holocaust>

The USC Shoah Foundation

<https://sfi.usc.edu/>

The Wiener Holocaust Library

<https://wienerholocaustlibrary.org/>



IMPACT OF THE HOLOCAUST ON JEWISH COMMUNITIES



Holocaust:

The total and systematic genocide, perpetrated by Nazi Germany and its collaborators, with the aim of annihilating the Jewish people. The primary motivation was the Nazis' antisemitic racist ideology. Between 1933 and 1941, Nazi Germany pursued a policy that dispossessed the Jewish community of their rights and their property, followed by the branding and concentration of the Jewish population. This policy gained broad support in Germany and much of occupied Europe. In 1941, following the invasion of the Soviet Union, the Nazis and their collaborators launched the systematic mass murder of the Jewish community. By 1945, nearly six million Jewish people had been murdered, as well as five million people from other marginalized groups. (Yad Vashem)

Holocaust definition adapted from "What Was the Holocaust?" Yad Vashem — The World Holocaust Remembrance Center. Accessed May 18, 2025.
<https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/what-was-the-holocaust.html#learnmore>

DRIVING QUESTION

The Holocaust was a systematic plan to exterminate the Jewish population of Europe. There were early signs of this dehumanization process and the annihilation of six million Jewish people. This long-term process was carefully crafted, and each phase of the plan was legal because of the Nazi Party's changes to laws in Germany (e.g., the Nuremberg Race Laws).

How can the Holocaust remind us that oppression is not a single event, but a long-term process involving political, legal, and social shifts that slowly dehumanize targeted groups? Can you identify modern examples where similar patterns are visible?

The Holocaust was not a single event, but a devastating series of escalating actions rooted in hatred, nationalism, and long-standing prejudices against the Jewish population that increased across Europe in the years following World War I. Germany's defeat in the war led to economic devastation, embarrassment, social unrest, and a crisis of national identity. The Treaty of Versailles (1919) deepened the wounds, fostering resentment among the German people and providing fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take hold. In this climate, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party gained power by exploiting fear, promoting antisemitism, and scapegoating Jewish people and other marginalized communities for Germany's struggles. The rise of the Nazis was not inevitable — it happened through legal means, propaganda, and because of a lack of coordinated resistance to early policies of exclusion and dehumanization. Studying the Holocaust as a series of decisions, indifference, actions, and failures to act allows us to reflect on the importance of the role we can each play to build inclusive, just, and compassionate societies.

The Holocaust was a genocide targeting Jewish people first and foremost. Six million Jewish people — men, women, and children — were murdered as part of the Nazis' plan to eliminate the Jewish people entirely. Events such as the Nuremberg Laws, Kristallnacht, as well as the formation of ghettos like Kraków and the establishment of extermination camps like Auschwitz, were primarily aimed at Jewish containment and extermination.

Alongside them, approximately five million others from persecuted groups also perished. From 1933 onward, the Nazi regime swiftly dismantled civil liberties, targeting Jewish people, disabled people, Roma, LGBTQIA+/ 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, political opponents, and others deemed "undesirable" under the eugenics ideology of the Nazi party. The Holocaust and testimonies of other genocides teach us the danger of indifference and the consequences of letting fear and propaganda overpower empathy, respect, and truth. The aftermath of the Holocaust left profound scars across communities, nations, and generations.

By centering its story on a single child, her family, and her interactions with a German officer, *The Fast Runner* helps viewers connect personally to the broader tragedy of the Holocaust and the dehumanizing impact of hatred and oppression. The film encourages empathy, reminding us that behind every statistic is a human being with dreams, talents, a story, and the right to live freely with dignity. The Holocaust unfolded through a chain of events driven not only by Nazi leadership but by the complicity and silence of many in German society. Still, there were instances of resistance — within ghettos, from outside countries, and by individuals risking everything to save others. The young girl in *The Fast Runner* symbolizes a resistance, resilience, and hope that humanity will persist even in the most challenging of times.

Personal Reflection

How does learning about the Holocaust challenge us to think about our own actions, prejudices, and the importance of standing up against injustice?

Discussion Questions

1. How did changes in events, decisions, attitudes, and everyday actions make it possible for the Holocaust to happen? Do you think anything could have been done earlier to stop it from happening? Why or why not?
2. What role did propaganda and the use of people's emotions and struggles (fear, shame, anger, poverty, stereotypes) play in dehumanizing Jewish people and other marginalized communities?
3. Approximately 11 million people were killed during the Holocaust, including six million Jewish people and five million people from other marginalized groups (disabled people, LGBTQIA+/ 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, political dissidents, other non-white ethnicities, etc.) How does remembering and honoring the experiences of victims of the Holocaust help us create a more inclusive and compassionate world today?
4. How do the testimonies and stories of victims, Holocaust survivors, and even bystanders help us develop empathy today? Why is empathy an important skill when studying difficult historical events like the Holocaust? How can empathy be a jumping off point for resistance and action?

Possible responses may include: Constructing and preserving the memory of those who perished is our civic duty and responsibility to pass it on to future generations for remembrance.

5. How can learning about the history of the Holocaust help us make better choices in the future? What are ways that ordinary people can stand up against hate or unfair treatment today? What can we do in our own communities to make sure everyone feels safe and respected?
6. How can we learn to detect early signs of discrimination and violent tendencies towards minority groups?

Extension Activities

1. Have students act as journalists during the Holocaust era. Allow each student (or group) to select a key event from the Holocaust timeline and produce a historical "news report" or script detailing the event and providing insight into the characters involved. Allow them to write from a contemporary perspective (as if they were reporting live), incorporating historical facts, primary sources, and emotional context. Students can present their work as newspaper articles, radio news broadcasts, TV-style news segments, podcast-style interviews, editorials, or front-page spreads.
2. Have students choose a real or composite figure whom they recognize as someone who has experienced systematic oppression. Have them write a first-person narrative or dramatic monologue describing that person's life, challenges, and emotional state during a specific moment in the timeline. Record or perform the monologues in class or create an audio podcast series.

Note: Students looking to engage with the recorded oral testimonies from Holocaust survivors or refugees to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences under systematic oppression can listen to interviews found within [The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Jeff and Toby Herr Oral History Archive](#), [The Montreal Holocaust Museum](#) or the [Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre](#).

3. Help students develop their critical thinking skills about media, misinformation, and visual literacy. Provide students with examples of propaganda posters, news articles, or video excerpts, etc. similar to those the Nazi party used during the Holocaust. Ask students to analyze: What is the message? Who is the target? What emotions is it trying to provoke? How does it dehumanize or “other” certain groups?
4. Have students work in groups to curate a visual exhibit for a Holocaust museum (real or virtual). Categories might include: daily life in the ghettos, resistance movements, children during the Holocaust, victims from marginalized groups, etc. Allow them to research and choose artifacts, create exhibit labels, and present to the class as museum curators.

Useful Terms

Antisemitism: A certain perception of Jewish people, which may be expressed as hatred toward the Jewish community. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities. (This definition utilized for this guide was adopted by the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance](https://www.ushmm.org/international-holocaust-remembrance-alliance).)

Armistice: A suspension of hostilities, or a truce, agreed upon by warring parties.

Concentration Camps: A place where large numbers of people, especially those seen as “undesirable” by the Nazis, were imprisoned in harsh conditions. Many were forced to work or were killed.

Dehumanize: To deprive someone of human qualities, personality, or dignity. Treat them as if they are less than human.

Discrimination: The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of ethnicity, age, sex, or disability.

Empathy: The ability to understand and share someone else's feelings.

Extremist: Having or involving beliefs that most people think are unreasonable and unacceptable.

Genocide: The crime of intentionally destroying part or all of a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group by killing people or other methods. (Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jewish lawyer, was responsible for coining this definition, as the word *genocide* did not exist before World War II.) (For more information, visit the USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia at <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/what-is-genocide#genocide-as-an-international-crime-2>)

Ghetto: A part of a city where Jewish people were forced to live, often in very poor and overcrowded conditions, before being deported to camps.

Ideology: A system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy.

Oppression: A situation in which people are treated in an unfair and cruel way with the goal of preventing them from having opportunities and freedom.

Prejudice: An unfair and unreasonable opinion or feeling, especially when formed without enough thought or knowledge.

Propaganda: Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view.

Additional Resources

Journeys in Film. 2013. *Defiant Requiem Curriculum Guide*.
<https://journeysinfilm.org/product/defiant-requiem/>

Journeys in Film. 2018. *Schindler's List Curriculum Guide*.
<https://journeysinfilm.org/product/schindlers-list/>

Montreal Holocaust Museum
<https://museeholocauste.ca/en/>

Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre
<https://www.intheirownwords.net/>

The National WWII Museum
<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/>

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Timeline of Events
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/timeline/holocaust>

The USC Shoah Foundation
<https://sfi.usc.edu/>

The Wiener Holocaust Library
<https://wienerholocaustlibrary.org/>

CROSS-MEDIA TO ENHANCE UNDERSTANDING OF THE HOLOCAUST



During and following the devastating events of the Holocaust, a large body of literature and art bearing witness to the atrocities was created by authors and artists. This record of horror works to ensure that people never forget and never allow unbridled hatred in any form to proliferate again.

While the Holocaust is part of broader human rights history, its primary focus — the annihilation of European Jewry — is significant in its scale, ideology, and systematic execution. Understanding its significance helps illuminate patterns of prejudice and genocide across history without losing sight of the Holocaust's distinct Jewish dimension.

During and following the devastating events of the Holocaust, a large body of literature and art bearing witness to the atrocities was created by authors and artists. This record of horror works to ensure that people never forget and never allow unbridled hatred in any form to proliferate again. *The Fast Runner* is in conversation with the stories and poems that came before it.

Encouraging students to read diverse accounts in various modalities helps them develop critical reading skills to gain an understanding of the events in deep and nuanced ways. Expanding the discourse to include other genocides and literature of oppressed peoples will teach students to look at structural, systematic, and historical issues that make tyranny and cultures of hate possible.

DRIVING QUESTION

How can reading, viewing, or listening to various perspectives of the Holocaust through film, short stories, memoirs, and poetry enrich our understanding of the complexity of characters' experiences?

Instructional Note

Attached as optional handouts are literary suggestions to enrich the viewing of the film through cross-media pairings. Teachers may choose to copy and distribute a selection from the stories and poems, pair the film with a full-length book study, or do a deep comparison with just one other text.

To deepen students' understanding as they engage with the following short stories and poems, consider incorporating additional resources, such as children's drawings, sketches, and other visual materials. These artifacts help broaden perspectives by offering intimate glimpses into the human experiences of individuals — children, parents, and grandparents — who endured life in ghettos and concentration camps. Below are links to examples that can support meaningful reflection and discussion:

- BBC News: 'Haunting' art by Jewish children in a World War 2 concentration camp <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lancashire-26987720>
- Library of Congress Blogs 'Lost Girls' Artwork from the Holocaust <https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2020/01/lost-girls-artwork-from-the-holocaust/>

Personal Reflection

Can you think of a story you have read, watched, or heard in different ways? Are the versions all the same, or are there differences? (Ask students to consider stories they have read in a book, seen in a movie, heard from a friend, or read about in history.)

Discussion Questions

1. What is the author's responsibility to be historically accurate when telling a historical fiction tale? What aspects do you feel are acceptable for fictionalization, and what aspects are not?
2. What is the difference between lived experience and researched retellings? What do readers and viewers need to know about the work's creator, if anything?
3. Compare characterization in the film and a chosen additional text. (Some literary options are provided as handouts.) Who is telling the story? What is their vantage point from within the narrative? How are they characterized? (Refer to the STEAL characterization method in Section 2.) Do characters change or develop throughout the narrative? A simple list of characters and notes for each can facilitate this comparison.

4. Consider what is missing and the effect of known and unknown information on the reader. For instance, in Ida Fink's short story "The Tenth Man," readers learn the story of Jewish community members returning to their village one by one after Nazi occupation. Readers don't get detailed information about the siege, violence, and climactic action. Instead, they quietly witness the physical and emotional effects of catastrophic trauma. Ask students to reflect on how the author engages their imagination as a reader. Discuss personal responses to the author's techniques and explain how these elements affect the experience with the text.
5. A hybrid piece of art combines different media or modalities within one piece of work. In *The Fast Runner*, viewers see a collection of historic photos within Frida's imagined story. How can stories deepen their impact through hybridity? Imagine combining stories, historical evidence, poetry, songs, art, monuments, social media posts, and more. Look at examples, imagine them without hybrid elements, and consider the effect on the impact. (Note: The included poem "Floaters" by Martin Espada opens with a callous Facebook post before humanizing and telling the story of unnamed immigrants crossing the U.S. border.)
6. Reflect on your understanding of the Holocaust after this activity. Has it changed? If so, how? If you could research further, what questions would you want answered?

Extension Activities

1. Invite students to create a shared Google Slides show in which they present various versions of the same story. (For example, for *Snow White*: the Grimm's Fairy Tale, the 1937 Disney film, a storybook, and the new live-action version.)
2. Have students transform a story into another mode. Imagine and create *The Fast Runner* as a poem, or write one of the poems attached as a short story, or create a film storyboard for "The Tenth Man."
3. Brainstorm ways we can give names to the anonymous stories of brutalized people.

Additional Resources

Novels and Memoirs

School Library Journal's robust list of middle school and YA books about the Holocaust

<https://www.slj.com/story/Commemorate-Holocaust-Rememberance-Day-with-this-Booklist-libraries-students>

Short Stories

<https://holocausteducation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Legacy-of-the-Holocaust-Liberation-home-The-Tenth-Man.pdf>

Handout A

Short Story, a Jewish survivor's reflection

“The Tenth Man”

by Ida Fink

The first to come back was Chaim the carpenter. He turned up one evening from the direction of the river and the woods; no one knew where he had been or with whom. Those who saw him walking along the riverbank didn't recognise him at first. How could they? He used to be tall and broad shouldered; now he was shrunken and withered, his clothes were ragged, and, most important, he had no face. It was completely overgrown with a matted black thicket of hair. It's hard to say how they recognised him. They watched him from above, from the cliff above the river, watched him plod along, until nearing the first houses of the lower town, he stopped and began to sing. First they thought he had gone mad, but then one of the smarter ones guessed that it was not a song, but a Jewish prayer with a plaintive melody, like the songs that could be heard on Friday evenings in the old days, coming from the hundred-year-old synagogue, which the Germans had burned down. The synagogue was in the lower town; the whole lower town had always been Jewish — before the Germans came and during the occupation — and no one knew what it would be like, now that the Jews were gone. Chaim the carpenter was the first to come back.

A dark cloud from the burnt-out fire still lingered over the town, the stench still hung in the air, and the gray clouds floated over the marketplace the Germans had burned.

In the evening, when the news had spread, a crowd gathered in front of Chaim's house. Some came to welcome him, others to watch, still others to see if it was true that someone had survived. The carpenter was sitting on the front steps in front of his house; the door of the house was nailed shut. He didn't respond to questions or greetings. Later, people said that his eyes had glittered emptily in the forest of his face, as if he were blind. He sat and stared straight ahead. A woman placed a bowl of potatoes in front of him, and in the morning she took it away untouched.

Four days later the next one came back. He was a tenant on a neighboring farm and had survived in the forest with the help of the farm manager. The manager brought the tenant back by wagon, in broad daylight. The old man was propped up, half reclining, on bundles of straw. His face, unlike the carpenter's, was as white as a communion wafer, which struck everyone as strange for a man who had lived so long in the open.

When the tenant got down from the wagon, he swayed and fell face down on the ground, which people ascribed more to emotion than to weakness. In fact, it was possible to think he was kissing the threshold of his house, thanking God for saving him. The manager helped him up and, supporting him on his arm, led him into the entrance hall.

A week passed and no one came back. The town waited anxiously; people came up with all sorts of conjectures and calculations. The stench of burnt objects faded into the wind and the days became clear. Spring blossomed suddenly as beffited the first spring of freedom. The trees put forth buds. The storks returned.

Ten days later three more men came back, a dry goods merchant and two grain dealers. The arrival of the merchant upset the conjectures and calculations, since everyone knew that he had been taken away to the place from which there was no return. He looked just as he had before the war; he might even have put on some weight. When questioned, he smiled and explained patiently that he had jumped out of a transport to Belzec and hidden in a village. Who had hidden him, and in what village, he didn't want to say. He had the same smile on his face that he used to have before the war when he stood behind his counters and sold cretonnes and percales. That smile never left his face, and it astonished everyone, because no one from this man's family had survived.

For three days the grain dealers slept like logs. They lay on the floor near their door, which was left slightly ajar, as if sleep had felled them the moment they walked in. Their high-topped boots were caked with dried mud, their faces swollen. The neighbors heard them screaming in their sleep at night.

The grain dealers were still asleep when the first woman returned. No one recognized her. Only when she reached the teacher's house and burst out sobbing did they understand that she was his wife. Even then, they didn't recognise her, so convincing was her beggar woman's disguise. She had begged in front of Catholic and Orthodox churches, had wandered from church fair to church fair and market to market, reading people's palms. Those were her hiding places. From beneath her plain kerchief peered the drawn face of a peasant woman.

They asked in amazement: "Is it you?"

"It's me," she answered in her low voice.

Only her voice was unchanged.

So there were six of them. The days passed, the gardens grew thick and green. They're being careful, people said, they're waiting for the front to move — it had been still for so long that the offensive seemed likely. But even when the offensive began and the front made a sudden jump to the west, only a few more came back.

A wagon brought the doctor back. He had lain for nine months in a hole underneath the cowshed of one of his patients, a peasant woman. He was still unable to walk.

The accountant and his son and the barber and his wife returned from a bunker in the forest. The barber, who had once been known for his mane of red hair, was bald as a bowling ball.

Every day at dusk, the dry goods merchant left his house and walked towards the railway station. When asked where he was going, he explained, "My wife is coming back today." The trains were still not running.

The farmer, a pious man, spent more and more time by his window; he would stand there for hours on end. He was looking for a tenth man, so that the prayers for the murdered might be said as soon as possible in the ruins of the synagogue.

The days kept passing, fragrant and bright. The trains began to run. The people in the town no longer conjectured and calculated. The farmer's face, white as a communion wafer, shone less often in his window.

Only the dry goods merchant — he never stopped haunting the railway station. He would stand there patiently, smiling. After a while, no one noticed him anymore.

Handout B

Suggested Poetry and Quotes

Note: The last stanza is especially useful and could be studied alone.

The Jews that We Are

by Richard Michelson

... you have inherited its burden without its mystery.

— Elie Wiesel

I. March 1979 and I am watching Nazis march through Chicago. The bold type of the Sun-Times describes a small band of hoodlums, undereducated boy scouts, the better to be ignored. My grandfather, back hunched over his Bible, agrees. Jews like myself should stay home, should lay down our stones and pray like the Jews that we are.

II. Grandfather, you are easy to love with your long beard and the way you sway like a palm branch in the storm. It is easy to romanticize your spiritual search, worldly naiveté and wise rabbinical words. You belong in the books I read by Singer, Peretz, Sholom Aleichem. But their characters are ignorant of the chapters to come. You know where their prayers will lead.

III. A circle. Six Nazis. Your wife in the middle. One soldier says all Jewesses are whores and the others agree. You say nothing. Years later you'll decide to speak: "Do we not serve Hitler's purpose, we who would sooner renounce our beliefs than assume our burdens?"

IV. A generation after the Holocaust and I know no Hebrew. No Yiddish. No Torah. I fast only on the Day of Atonement and even then I've been known to cheat. A generation after the Holocaust and I apologize for my grandfather's bent back and wild gestures. I used to tremble to the rhythm of his prayers. I feared the mysterious words that kept us from the devil. Now, from my window I watch Nazis march. Their feet strike the pavement like the ticking of a clock. I am a Jew a generation after the Holocaust. Poorer, my grandfather says, without a past than he, who has no future.

Citation:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/90405/the-jews-that-we-are>

First They Came

by Pastor Martin Niemöller

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

Citation:

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/martin-niemoeller-first-they-came-for-the-socialists>

This poem recounts the plight of refugees, what they have lost, and their struggle to find a place to live and continue their lives.

Refugee Blues

by W.H. Auden (1939)

Say this city has ten million souls,
Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes:
Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no
place for us.

Once we had a country and we thought it fair,
Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:
We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go
there now.

In the village churchyard there grows an old yew,
Every spring it blossoms anew:
Old passports can't do that, my dear, old passports
can't do that.

The consul banged the table and said,
"If you've got no passport you're officially dead":
But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive.

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;
Asked me politely to return next year:
But where shall we go to-day, my dear, but where
shall we go to-day?

Came to a public meeting; the speaker got up and said;
"If we let them in, they will steal our daily bread":
He was talking of you and me, my dear, he was
talking of you and me.

Thought I heard the thunder rumbling in the sky;
It was Hitler over Europe, saying, "They must die":
O we were in his mind, my dear, O we were in his mind.

Saw a poodle in a jacket fastened with a pin,
Saw a door opened and a cat let in:
But they weren't German Jews, my dear, but they
weren't German Jews.

Went down the harbour and stood upon the quay,
Saw the fish swimming as if they were free:
Only ten feet away, my dear, only ten feet away.

Walked through a wood, saw the birds in the trees;
They had no politicians and sang at their ease:
They weren't the human race, my dear, they
weren't the human race.

Dreamed I saw a building with a thousand floors,
A thousand windows and a thousand doors:
Not one of them was ours, my dear, not one of
them was ours.

Stood on a great plain in the falling snow;
Ten thousand soldiers marched to and fro:
Looking for you and me, my dear, looking for you and me.

Citation:

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/refugee-blues>

This powerful poem was written while the author was interned before he was killed. He remembers the last butterfly he saw, which is also a symbol of life and goodness, which are not present in the camps.

The Butterfly **(1942 while interned in a camp)**

by Pavel Friedmann

He was the last. Truly the last.
Such yellowness was bitter and blinding
Like the sun's tear shattered on stone.
That was his true colour.
And how easily he climbed, and how high,
Certainly, climbing, he wanted
To kiss the last of my world.
I have been here seven weeks,
'Ghettoized'.
Who loved me have found me,
Daisies call to me,
And the branches also of the white chestnut in the yard.
But I haven't seen a butterfly here.
That last one was the last one.
There are no butterflies, here, in the ghetto.

Citation:

<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://hmd.org.uk/resource/the-butterfly-by-pavel-friedmann/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1749342931008613&usq=AOvVaw1Epc15TJLVRBGITiStb3mA>



HUMAN RIGHTS



The horrific events of the Holocaust led to a movement to create a set of rights and freedoms for individuals – human rights – that all countries could agree on.

The task of defining human rights fell to the United Nations, an international body created in 1945 to maintain peace and security and increase cooperation between countries on economic, social, and humanitarian issues. Former First Lady of the United States Eleanor Roosevelt played a major role in shaping this vision, serving as the chair of the UN Human Rights Commission drafting committee, and becoming a driving force behind the creation and adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Prominent Canadian legal scholar and diplomat John Peters Humphrey was the principal author of the first draft of the declaration. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations on December 10, 1948, as a consequence of the Second World War and the atrocities committed by the Nazis against the Jewish population and other persecuted groups in Europe.

The big idea behind the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is that *all* people (including you!) are born free and equal and deserve respect and fairness. They include rights that impact your life every day: the right to go to school, to express your thoughts freely, to practice the religion of your choice, to be protected by laws, and to live somewhere safe. The architects of the Universal Declaration believed that these rights, taken together, are the “foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

Even though these rights are considered “universal” — meaning they apply to all people — there are still many places where human rights are not respected. In fact, no country has a perfect record of ensuring human rights for all the citizens and non-citizens within their borders. Governments may fail to ensure that all people accused of a crime get a fair trial, or that all children receive a quality education. Businesses may discriminate against certain groups of people when they are hiring, or fail to protect people’s privacy. And when individuals spread racist or sexist speech online or steal from someone, they are undermining human rights.

Human rights exist to protect us, but we are all responsible for protecting human rights. Human rights only work if we all play our part.

DRIVING QUESTION

What rights should all people have to ensure they can live a healthy, happy and prosperous life? How are those rights protected?

In the United States, human rights are enshrined in and protected by the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights.

In Canada, human rights are enshrined in and protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Instructional Note

Depending on the age of participants and their background knowledge, you may choose to look at the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which can be easier to grasp than the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Most of the questions and activities below can be easily modified to be used with the UNCRC. You might start by asking participants why they think children need their own set of rights. Each document can be found in its original text and in simplified, child-friendly language.

- *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* [original text](#) and [child-friendly text](#)
- *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* [original text](#) and [child-friendly text](#)

Personal Reflection

American civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Similarly, attorney Clarence Darrow said, “You can only be free if I am free.” When some people experience discrimination and their human rights are not fully protected, what impact might that have on you? How can protecting the rights of individuals have a global impact?

Discussion Questions

1. There are several big ideas that guide our understanding of human rights, including that human rights are *universal*, *inalienable*, *indivisible*, and *interdependent*. Do some research to define those terms and then discuss how they apply to human rights. Do you agree that all human rights are equally important? Can you think of examples of how the denial of one right might impact other rights?
2. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an “aspirational” document. Aspirational means that all countries should work to achieve these goals even if they can’t fully realize them yet. Why are human rights aspirational? What kinds of things might get in the way of achieving universal human rights?
3. In *The Fast Runner*, there were many examples of violations of human rights. Look through the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and see how many you can find that were shown in the film. Use your knowledge of the Second World War and the Holocaust to name any other human rights that were violated during this time.
4. We experience rights or lack of rights in our everyday lives. Discuss the following quote from Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the architects of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Then brainstorm a list of places in your community and discuss which human rights might apply in these places. Who are the duty-bearers responsible for protecting human rights in those places? What role can you play to uphold human rights?

“Where, after all, do universal rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.”

— Eleanor Roosevelt

Extension Activities

1. Choose one of the articles from the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and make a poster that highlights or advocates for protection of that right.

2. The protection of human rights continues to be a challenge in all countries of the world. Conduct research about a modern human rights issue of your choice. Some useful sources include the [United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner](#) and the independent organization [Human Rights Watch](#). On each site you can browse news and reports by topic or country, or read a comprehensive review of a country's current human rights issues in the latest Human Rights Watch *World Report*.

3. Imagine that a new landmass has been discovered and your entire class will be going to live there. Or maybe even a new planet! Have learners create a Bill of Rights for your new country.

a. In small groups, have learners brainstorm ten things that they will need to be healthy, happy, and prosperous, and present those to the larger group. Post their suggestions under the heading “Needs.”

- b. Now tell learners that the new government isn't able to provide all of those things, so they must take ten things away. Discuss as a larger group/class which things they should remove from the “Needs” list and put them under the heading “Wants.”
- c. Continue with additional rounds of cuts. Discuss the difference between wants and needs.
- d. Looking at the list of needs, have learners negotiate a Bill of Rights for the people of your new country.
- e. Once learners have identified the rights that people hold (the things they need to be healthy, happy, and prosperous), have them work to rewrite each right as a responsibility that each person has as part of the group. For example, access to fresh water might be an identified right, and the corresponding responsibility might be that each individual has a responsibility to share water resources. Discuss how rights and responsibilities are different but connected. Does this change how you think about rights?

(This activity is adapted from the [OHRCH ABC: Teaching Human Rights guide](#))

Useful Terms

Convention: An agreement between countries or international organizations about a particular matter, often negotiated and adopted through diplomatic processes. When ratified, conventions are legally binding.

Declaration: A formal statement of principles, goals, or positions made by countries or international organizations. Declarations are often not legally binding but can carry moral, political, and diplomatic weight.

Duty-bearer: Any person, group, organization, or government with a legal obligation or responsibility to respect and protect human rights.

Inalienable: Unable to be taken or given away. In the context of human rights, this means that no government or other entity has the right to take an individual's rights away.

Indivisible: Not able to be divided. In the context of human rights, this means that all rights are equally important.

Interdependent: Depending on one another. In the context of human rights, this means that denying one right will affect all of the other ones.

Ratify/ratified: The process by which a nation-state approves or gives formal consent for their government to be held responsible for enacting an international treaty or convention. When a convention is ratified, it becomes legally binding.

Universal: Regarding all people in the world or a particular group; applicable to all cases. In the context of human rights, this means that all people, everywhere, are equal and hold these rights by virtue of being human.

Additional Resources

Rights documents:

United Nations. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

United Nations. [Convention on the Rights of the Child, child-friendly version](#)

United Nations. [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

United Nations. [Universal Declaration of Human Rights, child-friendly version](#)

Additional curricula:

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. [ABC: Teaching Human Rights Guide - Practical Activities for Primary and Secondary Schools](#)

Amnesty International. [Know Your Rights and Claim Them: Child Rights Education Toolkit](#). This toolkit has a particularly good "Diversity Bingo" activity that links to the right of non-discrimination.

Other learning resources:

[Canadian Museum for Human Rights](#)

[Human Rights Watch](#)

[Montreal Holocaust Museum](#)

[National Center for Civil Rights and Human Rights](#)

[Toronto Holocaust Museum](#)

[United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commission](#)

[United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#)

Key Dates

Various	United States Days of Remembrance, observed from the Sunday before Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) through the following Sunday. Yom Hashoah falls on April 24, 2025, April 14, 2026, and May 4, 2027.
January 27	International Holocaust Remembrance Day
November	(1st week) Holocaust Education Week (Canada)
November 9	Kristallnacht
December 10	International Human Rights Day



RESISTANCE AND ACTION



Resistance is the act of resisting, opposing, exposing, or withstanding someone or something, usually a force of oppression, injustice, or violence.

Standing Up for Human Rights: Be the Change You Want to See in the World

Resistance is the act of resisting, opposing, exposing, or withstanding someone or something, usually a force of oppression, injustice, or violence. Resistance exists on a continuum from big and overt collective action — such as protest or boycott — to smaller individual mental or physical behaviors. Everyday acts of resistance are uncoordinated actions that individuals do to subvert or undermine power for their own survival, dignity, and agency. These acts of resistance may include noncompliance, evasion, and deception. They can also include how people express themselves through their clothes, music, and art. Acts of resistance take moral courage because they can sometimes be risky. They can also sometimes grow into whole movements.

Jewish Resistance

Amidah is a Hebrew word that means “standing up against,” and is defined by Holocaust scholar Yehuda Bauer as any action that resists the destruction of Jewish life, dignity, and humanity.

During the Holocaust, there were many who resisted Nazism and fought back against it. In a context where resistance often meant death, the very act of maintaining humanity was a profound rebellion against Nazi dehumanization. Jewish acts of resistance covered a broad range of individual to collective action.

- Spiritual resistance in occupied territories, ghettos, and concentration camps took the form of gathering to pray and conducting birth and death rituals and other outlawed religious ceremonies. Underground schools were also created to continue the spiritual and secular education of young people.
- Information is power. Resistance took the form of sharing intelligence with Allied forces and distributing anti-Nazi leaflets. Jewish people forced into ghettos created underground newspapers to spread information about the war.
- Documenting everyday life was an essential act of resistance that affirmed both an individual’s humanity and captured a collective experience. The Ringelblum Archive, also known as the Oneg Shabbat Archive, was secretly created to save documents, diaries, testimonies, drawings, and artifacts capturing the lives of Jewish people in the Warsaw Ghetto. The archive was buried before the ghetto’s destruction and later recovered. Philipp Manes wrote an extensive diary while imprisoned in the Theresienstadt Ghetto, even though it was illegal to do so. He documented his experience and collected poems, letters, and drawings from others, capturing their collective efforts to keep their culture alive. These first-hand accounts were created at great risk and are critical to our modern understanding of the Jewish experience of the Holocaust.

- Jewish organized resistance also took the form of smuggling food, forging documents, and organizing and leading dangerous escape efforts.
- There were more than 100 documented armed uprisings of Jewish people against Nazi forces. When Nazis came to deport the remaining 50,000 Jewish people living in the Warsaw Ghetto in Poland, the residents actively resisted and fought back using mines, grenades, and bullets. One hero of that uprising was the youth activist Tosia Altman, who used falsified papers to travel freely around occupied Poland to spread information, organize resistance groups, and move weapons. On October 14, 1943, Jewish prisoners held at the Sobibor concentration camp cut telephone and telegraph cables and wrested control over several areas of the camp. Several SS officers were killed in the uprising, and 300 prisoners successfully escaped and joined partisans fighting against the German army.

Other examples of everyday acts of resistance and action throughout history that may inspire your learners include:

- In 1791, after the British parliament failed to abolish slavery, British citizens mounted a successful boycott of sugar produced by enslaved people.
- Suffragettes, or women who advocated for the right to vote, often dressed in all white and handed out pamphlets on street corners and organized parades, alongside more militant tactics.
- During World War II, women wore red lipstick as a symbol of defiance because it was said to be hated by Adolf Hitler. Similarly, youth listened to swing music and dressed in baggy clothes during a time of austerity as a way of protesting fascism.
- In the Netherlands, a general work strike was called to protest Nazi occupation and antisemitic rules in 1941.
- Others resisted Hitler’s regime in more dangerous ways, including by hiding Jewish people to protect them from deportation to concentration camps.

- During the American civil rights movement, activists used seemingly simple non-violent strategies like sitting at white-only lunch counters (sit-ins), as well as organizing marches and boycotts.
- In the 1960s, those opposed to the Vietnam war expressed themselves through long hair and the music they made and listened to. They also burned draft cards and organized mass protests.
- During the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, women sometimes burned their bras and organized get-togethers where they shared information and ideas about women's role in society. Women in Iceland organized a full-day strike in 1975, called Women's Day Off, to raise awareness about gender inequality and the value of women's work in and outside the home. Over 90 percent of women took place, essentially shutting the country down. The strike was repeated in 2023 to address the wage gap, gender-based violence, and the unequal division of unpaid labour in the home.
- Since 2019, women in Iran have defied their country's strict dress code by removing their hijab, or headscarf, in public. Social media posts of individuals and groups of women have circulated since then, collectively known as The Girls of Enghelab protests. They risk arrest and years of imprisonment.

A bystander is someone who is present at an event or incident but who doesn't take part in what is happening. History is full of bystanders. By contrast, an upstander is someone who speaks up or acts in support of a cause or another person. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights defines an upstander as "a person who recognizes injustice, knows their personal strengths and uses those strengths to create change." Luckily, history is also full of upstanders.

As we see in the film *The Fast Runner*, anyone can be an upstander, resisting forces of injustice and oppression. Upstander moments can be simple acts. Ways in which people of all ages can be upstanders include:

- **Standing up for others.** When someone is being treated unfairly or bullied, an upstander can speak up or offer support to the person being harassed. Showing them they aren't alone can have a huge impact. Call for help if needed.
- **Respecting the environment.** Upstanders can take actions like reducing plastic, saving water, and recycling to resist pollution and waste. They can write to local businesses and advocate for better environmental practices.
- **Choosing kindness.** Upstanders resist hate, bullying, and exclusion when they spread positivity and are kind and inclusive.
- **Questioning unfair rules or situations.** Upstanders can ask questions and express their thoughts and feelings when things seem unfair.

Promoting equality. By embracing and celebrating differences of all kinds, upstanders can resist stereotypes and biases while standing by their beliefs. Upstanders know that doing what feels right, even when it's hard, is a powerful act of resistance.

DRIVING QUESTIONS

What does it mean to be an upstander? How do upstanders resist oppression and injustice and act as a force for positive change in the world?

Personal Reflection

1. When we talk about resistance or taking action, it's often against something — something you think is unjust or wrong. But it's equally important to be for something. What kinds of things are important to you that you would like to stand up for?
2. Most of us have been a bystander — a witness to something that really bothered us or made us uncomfortable because we knew it wasn't right. Maybe it was keeping quiet while another student was bullied, or not speaking up when a relative made disparaging comments. Reflect on a time when you were a bystander and journal about what you might do differently if you are in that situation again.
3. What instances of resistance, action, or civic engagement in past or modern history have impressed or moved you? If you could time travel, which social or political movement would you like to witness and participate in? Have you participated in any civic engagement before? What effect did it have on you?

Discussion Questions

1. Learning to recognize hate and violent speech when it occurs is an important step in preventing its spread and promoting respectful, inclusive dialogue. Dehumanizing and degrading speech is often used by those in power to underscore differences between groups of people. Conversely, how can we use the power of language to uplift people? How can the words we choose empower others and be an act of resistance?
2. What kinds of character traits and strengths do you feel upstanders share? Brainstorm a list. What kinds of skills could be useful for upstanders to have?
3. In what ways can you be an upstander against discrimination in your community? How can you express solidarity with those who are discriminated against?
(It may be useful to remind students that being an upstander doesn't necessarily mean confronting the harasser if it is not safe to do so, but can mean standing in solidarity with the harassee.)
4. In the film *The Fast Runner*, Frida tells Herr Müller that the "wind" is a lonely power because it doesn't know the power of a simple "good morning" or the power of sharing a loaf of bread with a neighbor. What message is Frida sending to Herr Müller? How is her saying "good morning" to him at the end of the film an act of resistance? What other acts of resistance are portrayed in the film?
5. Read the quote "*First They Came*" by Pastor Martin Niemöller. What are the dangers of being a bystander and not speaking up or acting against injustice? What are the benefits and risks of speaking up or acting? Do you think the benefits outweigh the risks?

Extension Activities

1. Research ways in which Jewish people and non-Jewish people in Germany acted in resistance to the Nazi regime. What kinds of tactics and strategies did they use? What risk accompanied those tactics and strategies?
2. In small groups or individually, research an upstander whose actions — whether big or small — had a larger impact when they stood up in support for human rights or other causes. Use (or adapt) the graphic organizer in **Handout D - Research an Upstander** to help.
3. Take an upstander pledge! Make and decorate individual pledges on index cards and create a display for your class or community space. You can use this example from the Canadian Museum of Human Rights:

As an upstander, I, [your name] can use my personal strength of [name your strength] to take a stand for [name your issue].

4. In a group, define what problem you want to address and brainstorm possible solutions. Think about a small action you can take to improve life in your community or school. What strengths do you have (individually and as a group) that will be useful in standing up for this cause? What kind of actions can you take? Research common tactics used by upstanders (for example, sit-ins, marches, fashion, music/dance, letter-writing campaigns, boycotts, symbolic actions, etc.). Who else do you need to convince to get on board and how will you convince them (for example, parents, teachers, business owners, elected officials)? Build a visual timeline or other style of presentation to map out an action plan for addressing your social issue.

5. 1943 was a year of significant resistance and uprisings throughout Germany and nations living under German occupation. Acts of resistance and uprisings took place in Jewish ghettos, concentration camps, and in other areas throughout Europe. In small groups, learners should select an act of resistance or an uprising from this year to research so that they can share their findings with their learning community. Once presentations are complete, the learning community can chart these acts on a timeline to build a larger picture of resistance at this time.
6. Research the following quotes and acts of resistance and reflect on what these individuals and examples tell us about resistance and why it is important, not only to the final goal of overcoming oppression, but also to solidifying one's own humanity and feelings of worth.

“To live is to resist.”

— Mordechai Anielewicz, commander of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

In one of his final letters, written from the Warsaw Ghetto during the uprising, Mordechai Anielewicz (who was only 24 years old) expressed that **continued Jewish existence** in the face of Nazi extermination was itself an act of defiance.

“Our resistance is the affirmation of our humanity.”

— Abba Kovner, Jewish partisan leader in Vilna

Abba Kovner famously called upon Jews to resist Nazi oppression, not with the hope of survival, but to preserve human dignity. He later helped form the Jewish partisans who fought in the forests.

Useful Terms

Bystander: A person who is present at an event or incident but who doesn't take part in what is happening.

Human Rights: The universal rights held by all individuals by virtue of their humanity.

Resistance: The act of resisting, opposing, exposing or withstanding someone or something, usually a force of oppression, injustice, or violence.

Upstander: A person who speaks up or acts in support of a cause or another person.

Additional Resources

How To Become An Accidental Activist
 by Elizabeth MacLeod and Frieda Wishinsky

For older kids and teens, the article “The Edelweiss Pirates, Zazous, and Swing Kinds: How Youth Subculture Resisted the Nazis During World War II” by Zack Budryck in *Teen Vogue* (February 25, 2025) is an interesting read.

<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/edelweiss-pirates-zazous-swing-kids-youth-subcultures-world-war-ii>

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights has an interactive student page that profiles several upstanders and makes links to human rights:

<https://humanrights.ca/upstander/#/>,

as well as a teacher's guide:

<https://humanrights.ca/upstander/#/teacher-guide>

They also have a collection of resources that explore the links between music, activism, protest and human rights:
<https://humanrights.ca/resource-guide/music-and-human-rights>

Jewish Upstanders website
<https://jewishupstanders.org/>

Bielski Brothers' Biography, Facing History, Facing Ourselves:
<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/bielski-brothers-biography>

Handout C

Suggested Quote (For use with Discussion Question #5)

First They Came

by Pastor Martin Niemöller

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

Citation:

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/martin-niemoeller-first-they-came-for-the-socialists>

Handout D

(For use with Extension Activity #2)

Research an Upstander

Directions: In small groups or individually, select and research an upstander whose actions — whether big or small — had a significant impact when they stood up in support for human rights or other causes.

Examples:

- Emanuel Ringelblum (Jewish archivist, Warsaw Ghetto, World War II)
- Toshia Altman (young Polish Jewish activist and organizer)
- Irene Sandler (part of the Polish Underground Resistance, World War II)
- Nicolas Winton (British humanitarian, World War II)
- Janusz Korczak (Polish Jewish doctor who died at a concentration camp)
- Oskar Schindler (German humanitarian, World War II)
- Jan Karski (Polish resistance fighter, World War II)
- Varian Fry (American journalist who ran a resistance network, World War II)
- Chiune Sugihara (Japanese diplomat in Lithuania during World War II)
- Sophie Scholl (White Rose non-violent resistance group, World War II)
- Gino Bartali (cyclist, resistance supporter, World War II)
- Miep Gies (Dutch citizen who hid Anne Frank's family, World War II)
- Rosa Parks (Civil Rights activist)
- Viola Desmond (Civil Rights activist)
- Malala Yousafzai (education activist)
- Autumn Pelletier (water keeper)
- Emma González and David Hogg (March for Our Lives, gun safety activists)
- Tommie Smith and John Carlos (1968 Olympians)
- Anonymous "Tank Man" (Tiananmen Square)
- Mary Malony (suffragette, Dundee by-election)
- Jaime Black (artist, REDress Project)
- Elsa Holzer (protester, Rosenstrasse Demonstration)
- Liz Christy (Green Guerillas)
- William Kamkwamba (inventor)
- Colin Kaepernick (sports figure and social justice activist)
- Name a person that you know or have witnessed as an upstander. (Interview them or others who witnessed the act of resistance to capture their story.)

Research an Upstander

Upstander's Name

**What cause do they stand up for?
Can you link that cause to
a human right?**

**Write a short bio of your
upstander and include a
photograph if you can find one.**

Place photo here.

**What personal traits or strengths
do they have that have made them
a successful upstander (for exam-
ple, communication skills, artistic
skills, courage, knowledge or
insight, compassion, leadership)**

**What tactics or strategies did they
use when they first became an
upstander?**

**Were there any risks associated
with their actions?**

**What impact do you think their
actions have had on others?
What change, if any, did they
create through their actions?**

**What do you admire about this
upstander? How have they
inspired you?**

MEDIA LITERACY



Media literacy is increasingly important in today's rich visual, textual, and multimedia landscape.

Teaching students to analyze how films portray historical events, build tension, and use cinematography to evoke emotion is crucial to creating engaged, discerning viewers and consumers.

This scaffolded lesson includes methods for close watching and annotating film followed by discussion questions where students use their notes to respond with supporting evidence and insights.

Close watching to understand the rhetorical moves used by the film director and crew is a fundamental skill that carries over into close reading of textual material. It is a useful practice and tool that promotes slow, critical “reading” of the variety of cultural products students encounter daily.

DRIVING QUESTIONS

How is film a unique medium to share stories? What does film offer that is different from text?

Personal Reflection

What is something you learned about from the film *The Fast Runner* that sticks with you? How did you learn about it? Can you make any connection between the delivery format and your interest?

Close Watching Activity

Before the class discussion, guide students through closely watching *The Fast Runner* by encouraging them to annotate and take notes while viewing. The film is short and would benefit from two viewings on sequential days. The first viewing will ground students in the narrative, while the second can support close watching and annotation. The attached **Fast Runner Viewing Guide Handouts E & F** might be useful, or you can provide students with big sheets of unlined paper to create mind maps while they watch.

Tell students there are three acts in this short film and one primary source montage. They should be able to distinguish and make note of each act of change. For each scene, they will track imagery (including setting), lighting and colors, sound (including music), possible symbols and motifs, and mood. Emphasize that they are just capturing impressions and ideas as they watch. They are not expected to have cohesive or “right” answers for any of the categories.

In addition, students will track the characters in each scene using the STEAL method. Remind students about indirect characterization. Ask them to fill out what they can on the worksheet, paying special attention to the changes and developments from scene to scene. Assure them that they might have empty spaces for some of the worksheets and that they should focus on the

most notable aspects of characterization.

Discussion Questions

1. Consider the impact of *The Fast Runner*’s story as a short film. Why do you think the director decided to make a short film instead of a feature-length film or a documentary? How would this story have worked as a short story? Graphic novel? Poem?
2. Early in the film, we see Adam taking photos of his friends in the park. We look with him through the viewfinder and then see the final still photograph.
 - a. How does his photography work throughout the film?
 - b. How does it change?
 - c. What does it capture?
 - d. How does still photography within a movie direct or focus the viewer’s attention?
 - e. Why do you think the director used this technique throughout the film?
3. Consider the symbols in the film and the themes they carry.
 - a. Making bread / a growing or developing child
 - b. A person recognized as an extension of their uniform versus a specifically named individual
 - c. Photographs and the act of photography
 - d. The wind (specifically the dialogue in Act 3)
 - e. The idea of running a race and winning
 - f. The Star of David was required for identification by the state versus worn as a necklace by choice.
4. How does the use of music and sound in each scene change

and signal the mood to the viewer?

5. How did you react to the primary source montage after Act 2?

What feelings did the photos evoke? What do you think about embedding historical photos into a historical fiction story? Can you think of other uses for this technique?

6. What lines of dialogue stood out to you? Which ones seemed to carry deeper meaning or themes?

7. Looking over your notes, how does each character change throughout the film? Which characters seem static, and which ones change the most? What evidence from the film can you use to support your idea?

8. What examples of a character's agency or personal power do you see in the film?

9. Considering the discussion and your notes, what do you think are the major themes of the film? Can you provide evidence to support your idea?

Extension Activities

1. Consider watching more short films as warm-ups and bell ringers to practice close watching and note-taking.

2. If students have access to filmmaking and editing equipment, have them create short films or scenes using some of the cinematic methods used in *The Fast Runner*.

3. If students took close notes and participated in a robust discussion, they would be well prepared to write a critical essay about the film. Consider assigning a formal essay or a modified writing assignment, such as composing a thesis and writing a detailed outline.

Useful Terms

Primary source: A source of information that comes directly from the time period being considered (personal interviews, newspaper article, diary entry, letter, government papers, photograph, artifact...).

Secondary Source: A source of information created after the time period under study that is analyzed or interpreted by a writer, historian, or scholar using primary sources and other secondary sources.

Symbol: The use of an object, character, imagery, or setting to represent something abstract that supports the theme or ideas in a literary or artistic work.

Motif: A symbol that repeats throughout the work that signals the theme; it can also be a literary device that is used symbolically throughout.

Indirect characterization: As opposed to direct characterization, which tells the viewer/reader directly about a character (e.g., "She is a good builder."), indirect characterization shows the viewer/reader through actions, dialogue, physical attributes, and the character's effect on those around them.

STEAL method of characterization: A useful acronym to remind students about the ways to identify (or create) indirect characterization.

S — says/speech — the character's dialogue, the content of their speech, and how they speak

T — thoughts — the character's inner thoughts as inferred or shown in voice-over, letters, inner monologues

E — effect on others — how others react to the character's actions or presence

A — actions — what a character does

L — looks — how a character looks, dresses, presents themselves, moves their body through space

Additional Resources

Handouts E & F (shown on next two pages)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/14liUm08B2jtcaNYOgBzGPCqlRULrYF6tTuiQZlxzjv0/edit?usp=sharing>

Non-fiction:

Edith Eger's *The Choice: Embrace the Possible* (Memoir, high school)

Elie Wiesel's *Night* (Memoir, high school)

Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man* (Memoir, high school)

Diary of Anne Frank (Memoir, middle school)

Ari Folman and David Polonsky's *Anne Frank's Diary: The Graphic Adaptation* (Graphic memoir, middle school)

Fiction:

R.J. Palacio's *White Bird* (Graphic novel, middle school)

Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (Novel, middle school)

Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars* (Novel, middle school)

Primo Levi's *The Periodic Table* (Short story collection, high school)

Susan Bartoletti's *The Boy who Dared* (Novel, middle school)

Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (Graphic novel, high school)

Joseph Joffo's *A Bag of Marbles* (Graphic novel, middle school)

Poetry:

Various by Nelly Sachs (high school)

Fast Runner Viewing Guide

Character	S — speech	T — thoughts	E — effect on others	A — actions	L — looks
Adam					
Frida					
Father					
Rabbi					
Müller					
Others					

Fast Runner Viewing Guide

ACT 1 – Poland, 1938	Act 2 – Piotrków Ghetto Poland, 1939	Primary Source Montage	Act 3 – Nazi Death Camp, 1942
Imagery/Setting			
	Light/ Color		
	Sound/ Music		
	Symbols/Motifs		
	Mood		



FILM CREDITS

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER

David Bercovici-Artieda

WRITER/PRODUCER

Michael Bruce Adams

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

**Jacob Bercovici, Curtis Chambers, Jane Charles,
Dan Angel, Jane Taylor-Lee, Brian Gott**

CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

John and Trudy Jacobson

PRODUCER

Ken Shapkin

CO-PRODUCER

Fabiola Arias

IMPACT PRODUCER

Leah Marshawski

ADVISOR

Jennifer Reibman

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

David Bercovici-Artieda

PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Sarah Monteith

EDITOR

Richard Nord

COSTUME DESIGNERS

Constance Moerman, Josie Saldat

HAIR DESIGN

Carmel Graham

MAKEUP DESIGN

Teia Dumaresq

CASTING

Judy JK Lee

ORIGINAL SCORE

Ronny Katz

IMAGE CREDITS

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**PO Box 65357
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